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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000696

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION RE-RUN OUTCOME
STRENGTHENS VMRO-DPMNE ADVANTAGE

REF: SKOPJE 669 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(B) & (D).

SUMMARY.

11. (SBU) Parliamentary election re-runs in 29 polling stations (representing less than one percent of Macedonia's 3,000 polling stations) generally were well conducted, although international monitors noted some serious irregularities in some stations. The voting gave one additional MP seat to right-of-center VMRO-DPMNE, while eAlbanian DUI of the outgoing governing coalition lost a seat. That result raises the likelihood of a VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition government with a solid majority, while making it more likely that DUI will be left out of a future government.

12. (C) The Charge encouraged DUI to play a constructive role as an opposition party, and to avoid making statements suggesting destabilizing consequences for Macedonia if the party is not included in a future government coalition. Nevertheless, DUI leaders insist that the eAlbanian population will be angered if DUI is not included in the coalition. It is unlikely VMRO-DPMNE will do so, since party president Gruevski then would risk alienating his political support base for having "caved in" to DUI's threatening statements. End Summary.

JULY 19 ELECTION RE-RUNS - GENERALLY CALM, SOME SERIOUS IRREGULARITIES

13. (SBU) A little more than a week after Macedonia's July 5 parliamentary elections (reftel), the Supreme Court accepted a number of election appeals from the main contending parties (VMRO-DPMNE, DPA, and DUI), resulting in re-runs in 29 polling stations in three of the country's six electoral districts on July 19. The Supreme Court decision came after the State Election Commission (SEC) summarily dismissed the appeals without examining the evidence the parties had presented. Up to five MP seats, out of 120 seats total in the unicameral parliament, were at stake.

14. (U) The international community (IC -- US Embassy, NATO, EU, OSCE, French and Norwegian Embassies) provided 20 teams, including two Embassy teams, to monitor the elections. The local NGO MOST also provided monitors in each of the 29 polling stations, which represented just under one percent of the more than 3,000 polling stations in the country. Police presence at many of the stations was strong.

¶15. (U) On July 20, IC representatives met and agreed that the voting was well conducted in most stations. They noted, however, that monitors had observed serious irregularities -- such as ballot-stuffing, proxy and family voting, multiple voting, inter-party tensions, and intimidation of domestic and international observers -- in other stations.

¶16. (U) One polling station was closed during the day to avoid potential clashes between ethnic Albanian rival parties DUI and DPA. The State Election Commission (SEC) may call for re-voting at that station if it is clear that voting there could have affected the final outcome in that electoral district.

VMRO-DPMNE-LED COALITION WINS A SEAT, DUI LOSES ONE

¶17. (SBU) Voter turnout was low, at 43 percent. Initial SEC results showed a net gain of one MP seat for right-of-center VMRO-DPMNE (now with 45 seats), which won the July 5 election, and a loss of one seat for eAlbanian DUI (17 seats), a junior coalition member in the outgoing SDSM-led government. If that result is confirmed, the coalition VMRO-DPMNE President Gruevski is cobbling together (reftel) likely will hold 65 seats (including 11 DPA seats, 7 from NSDP, and one each from DOM and PEI).

¶18. (SBU) With eAlbanian PDP (3 seats) indicating it may leave its DUI coalition partner to join Gruevski, and with the ethnic Turk (2 seats) and Serb (1 seat) parties expected to abandon the SDSM-led coalition to do the same, Gruevski could conceivably end up with a 71-seat majority. That would fall short of the 2/3 majority he had aimed for when he was

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courting DUI just after the July 5 balloting, but it would provide a solid base from which to pursue an ambitious reform agenda.

CHARGE ENCOURAGES DUI TO PLAY CONSTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION ROLE

¶19. (C) Throughout the July 19 polling, IC representatives received messages from DUI officials warning that failure to include DUI in a future government could lead to eAlbanian discontent. That discontent might be manifested, they said, through demonstrations, rioting, and more extreme measures to express anger over Gruevski's perceived refusal to recognize DUI as the legitimate representative of eAlbanian citizens in Macedonia. DUI Deputy PM Xhaferi and party leader Ali Ahmeti made similar statements in the local press.

¶110. (C) Charge phoned Ahmeti and Xhaferi July 20 to caution them against making such statements. Warning that it was unacceptable for any party to threaten destabilization in the event its political demands were not met, he encouraged the DUI leaders to strive for a constructive role as an opposition party if Gruevski decided against including them in a future government.

¶111. (C) Ahmeti insisted that many eAlbanians were "outraged" at the outcome of the elections. They felt they no longer were able to shape the fate of Macedonia. He argued that ethnic Albanian citizens had voted against DPA in previous elections because of that party's links to corruption and prostitution. As a result, including DPA in a future government while excluding DUI would be seen as thwarting the will of the eAlbanian population, in his view.

GRUEVSKI DISCUSSES NEXT STEPS

¶112. (C) DCM met with Gruevski July 20 to discuss next steps in the coalition-building process. Gruevski said he was still counting on a 65-seat coalition, and was negotiating with the Serbs and Turks, and indirectly with PDP, to boost that number. Those parties' demands were higher than their electoral strength warranted, however, and it was possible he

would not include them in the government.

¶13. (C) The chances of DUI joining the government had been slim, Gruevski said, and their threatening statements now made it even more unlikely that he could bring them into the government since he would then appear to be bowing to blackmail. DCM encouraged Gruevski to maintain a constructive relationship with DUI, whatever he decided about the coalition. Gruevski agreed and said he wanted to maintain a positive relationship with Ahmeti's party.

¶14. (C) Gruevski said he wanted to finish "80 percent" of the coalition-building process by July 26, when he expected to receive the mandate from President Crvenkovski following the first constitutive session of the new parliament. Ten days after that, he hoped to have the parliamentary vote on his government and governing program.

COMMENT

¶15. (C) Overall, the general lack of serious incidents or violence at the polling stations was a welcome sign, despite the numerous reported instances of procedural and other serious irregularities. The fact that the Supreme Court carefully examined the parties' appeals and then ordered the re-runs also was a positive development. With Gruevski nearly assured of a solid majority, it is less likely that DUI would be invited to join a governing coalition. As Gruevski noted, including DUI in the government at this stage would look to the public and the VMRO-DPMNE rank-and-file as if he had caved in to DUI's threatening statements.
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